



October 26, 2006

Message from the Assistant Secretary

Passage of the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006

The successful passage of the 16th reauthorization of the Older Americans Act will play a vital role in redirecting our long-term care system to help older Americans remain active and engaged in their communities – the overwhelming preference of the American people. The OAA embodies our nation's commitment toward ensuring the dignity and independence of our older citizens by promoting older Americans' full participation in society, and supporting their overwhelming desire to remain living in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

Other provisions include:

- Enhanced Federal, State, and Local coordination of long-term care services provided in home and community-based settings
- Support for State and community planning to address the long-term care needs of the baby boom generation
- Greater focus on prevention and treatment of mental disorders
- Outreach and service to a broader universe of family caregivers under the National Family Caregiver Support Program
- Increased focus on civic engagement and volunteerism
- Enhanced coordination of programs that protect elders from abuse, neglect, and exploitation

The new legislation advances the President's New Freedom initiative and affirms the Administration's commitment to health promotion and disease prevention, value, and ownership. The OAA embeds the principles of the Administration's Choices for Independence initiative. The legislation modernizes community-based long-term care systems to empower consumers to manage their own care and make choices that will allow them to avoid institutional care and live healthy lives in the community. I encourage members of the Aging Network and others to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the OAA Amendments 2006 now posted on the AoA Web site. For more information visit: http://www.aoa.gov/OAA2006/Main_Site/index.aspx.

Josefina G. Carbonell

AoA Joins CMS in *My Health. My Medicare.* Fall Campaign

Through AoA's partnership at the grassroots level, we are helping Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers make the most of benefits that are designed to help them stay healthier and spend less on prescription drugs. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has recently launched the *My Health. My Medicare* fall campaign that will provide tools to help people with Medicare manage their health and health care costs. Medicare is offering personalized information that will help people better understand their health care options, make smarter Medicare health and drug plan choices, and ensure they get the most out of their Medicare. CMS recommends that people with Medicare conduct a *My Health. My Medicare* enrollment checkup annually beginning in mid-October to examine their Medicare health and prescription drug coverage to ensure that it meets their needs, and make sure they are taking advantage of available preventive benefits.

This campaign builds upon partnerships with CMS, AoA, and the National Aging Services Network, through thousands of our grassroots community-based partners that were in the forefront in providing one-on-one assistance to people with Medicare on the prescription drug enrollment process. We will continue to help beneficiaries understand and evaluate their entire Medicare benefits, including Part D and preventive services. The more information beneficiaries have, the easier it will be for them to work with their doctors to stay healthy. For more information visit: <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MyHealthMyMedicare/>.

Medicare Releases Data on 2007 Drug Plan Options

On September 29, CMS announced that seniors who are satisfied with their current Medicare prescription drug coverage will not have to take any action when the Medicare Open Enrollment period begins November 15th, but those who wish to make a change will find new options with lower costs and more comprehensive coverage available for 2007. They will also find new tools from Medicare to help them make a choice. Surveys consistently show over 80 percent of Medicare beneficiaries are satisfied with their current coverage and drug plans. As a result of the Medicare prescription drug benefit, more than 38 million seniors and people with disabilities now have some form of drug coverage.

The monthly premium beneficiaries will pay in 2007 will average \$24 if they stay in their current plan -- about the same as in 2006. While some people will see an increase in their current plan premiums, they have the option to switch plans. Nationally, 83 percent of beneficiaries will have access to plans with premiums lower than they are paying this year, and beneficiaries will also have access to plans with premiums of less than \$20 a month. For a copy of the press release visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060929.html>. For more information about available prescription drug plans go to: www.medicare.gov/medicarerereform/local-plans-2007.asp.

HHS Announces More Than \$13 Million for Community Prevention Programs for Older Americans

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt announced on September 28 the release of more than \$13 million to 16 states to improve the health and quality of life for older Americans. This announcement, part of a collaboration with The Atlantic Philanthropies announced earlier this year, supports President Bush's *HealthierUS* Initiative which encourages people to take control over their health in order to live longer, better and healthier lives. HHS will support efforts over three years to support the delivery of evidence based programs for senior aging services provider organizations, such as senior centers, nutrition programs, senior housing projects, and faith based organizations. At least 36 communities will have programs up and running within a year. For a copy of the press release go to:
<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060928.html>.

HHS Announces State Grants to Expand and Streamline Access to Long-Term Care

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt announced on September 27 nearly \$6 million in additional funding to 22 states to expand their efforts to establish single entry points to long-term care for families who are trying to learn about and access services in their communities. These Aging and Disability Resource Center grants are part of the President's New Freedom Initiative and the Administration's commitment to bring value driven health and long-term care so consumers can make informed decisions about their care options. To date, 43 states have received over \$40 million in support under the ADRC initiative, which is jointly administered by AoA and CMS. States are using ADRC funds to better coordinate and redesign their existing methods for providing seniors, younger people with disabilities, and family caregivers with information and personalized assistance in accessing services such as meals-on-wheels, personal care, housekeeping, specialized transportation, assisted living, and nursing home care.

For a copy of the press release visit:

<http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060927a.html>.

HHS Partners with States on Long-Term Care Education Efforts

On September 25, HHS announced a partnership with six states that will help Americans take an active role in planning ahead for their future long-term care needs. Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Texas were chosen to participate in the next round of HHS' *Own Your Future* campaign, an aggressive education and outreach effort designed to promote long-term care planning among state residents. Governors of the six participating states will send letters to all households containing residents who are between the ages of 45-65, promoting awareness of aging needs and encouraging them to order a free Long-Term Care Planning Kit. This kit features information about Medicare and Medicaid benefit packages, outlines ways to plan ahead and legal issues to consider, and provides guidance on how to assess private financing options. The program is coordinated by three HHS components – CMS, AoA and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. The *Own Your Future* campaign is part of ongoing

Administration efforts to ensure that all people needing long-term care services and support achieve a high quality of life, in the least restrictive environment possible. The new federal-state partnerships represent the next round of the education campaign, which HHS has been working on with the National Governors Association for the last three years. For a copy of the press release visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060925.html>. To order or download a copy of the toolkit go to: <http://www.aoa.gov/LTC/index.asp>.

AoA Awards \$1.2 Million for Senior Medicare Patrol Integration Projects

Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina G. Carbonell awarded on September 25 nearly \$1.2 million to fund fifteen new Senior Medicare Patrol Integration projects. SMP projects train retired professional volunteers to help educate older Americans, their families and caregivers to become better health care consumers by protecting their Medicare information, learning how to detect Medicare billing errors and potential health care fraud and abuse, and reporting potentially fraudulent activities. Since 2004, the Senior Medicare Patrol Integration projects have helped to ensure that the SMP program more effectively reaches seniors with the message of healthcare fraud prevention. For a copy of the press release visit: http://www.aoa.gov/press/pr/2006/09_Sept/09_25_06.asp. For more information on the Senior Medicare Patrol program, please visit AoA's SMP Resource Center website at www.smpresource.org.

National Family Caregivers Month 2006

Planning for National Family Caregivers Month 2006 is now underway. Activities will be dedicated to thanking, supporting, educating, and celebrating the more than 50 million family caregivers across the country currently providing caregiving services. This November's National Family Caregivers Month will emphasize the need to help family caregivers protect their health in order to have a more satisfying life and be better able to provide their loved ones with the best care possible. For more information visit: <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/aoaprof/caregiver/caregiver.asp>.

For more information about Aging News, please visit:
<http://www.aoa.gov/press/news/news.asp>

For more information about Health News, please visit:
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To view AoA's Calendar of Events, please visit:
<http://www.aoa.gov/press/events/events.asp>

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About AoA

AoA works with a nationwide network of organizations and service providers to make support services and resources available to older persons and their caregivers. For more information about AoA, please contact us by mail at U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; by phone at (202) 619-0724; by e-mail at aoainfo@aoa.gov; or visit us on the Web at www.aoa.gov.